A HUNDRED YEARS OF PHILOSOPHY

John Passmore

[1957]

PENGUIN BOOKS

1966

CHAPTER 18

Wittgenstein and Ordinary Language Philosophy

In his preface to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein expressed himself thus confidently: 'the truth of the thoughts communicated here seems to me unassailable and definitive.' 'I am of the opinion,' he continued, 'that the problems have in essentials been finally solved.' One need not be surprised, then, that he abandoned philosophy for a number of years. He had turned philosopher, in his engineer's way, in order to drain what seemed to him a swamp. The task was completed; there was no more to be said.

In his years of silence, however, he was not left entirely alone. Ramsey and Braithwaite sought him out in his Austrian retreat and, for some part of the time, he was in close contact with Schlick and Waismann.* Round about 1928, his interest in philosophy revived. The stimulus may have been Brouwer's lectures on the foundations of mathematics, the set of problems which had originally led Wittgenstein to philosophy. In 1929, he returned to Cambridge.

His paper on 'Logical Form', his last public statement of the views he was later unreservedly to condemn, was published in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (Supplementary Volume) for that same year. Philosophy, Wittgenstein there argued, attempts to construct an 'ideal language', a language the terms of which are all of them precisely defined and the sentences of which unambiguously reveal the logical form of the facts to which they refer; such a perfect language must rest upon atomic propositions; the fundamental philosophical problem is to describe the

*His conversations with Ramsey, Wittgenstein tells us, woke him from his dogmatic slumber. We can as yet only guess what these discussions were about; but it is worth noting that there is a distinct pragmatic streak both in the later writings of Ramsey and in *Philosophical Investigations*. Professor D. A. T. Gasking has suggested to me that some of the ideas about science contained in N. Campbell's *Physics: The Elements* may also have been brought to Wittgenstein's notice by Ramsey. Wittgenstein was also greatly influenced, he tells us himself, by the criticisms of the economist P. Sraffa – I do not know in what respects.

structure of these atomic propositions. His subsequent writings are in large part a reaction against this Russellian 'philosophy of logical atomism'.[1]

Philosophers, Wittgenstein came to think, had made the mistake of trying to model their activities on those of scientists – as indeed, the very phrase 'logical atomism' suggests; that is why they had tried to lay down strict definitions and to discover true, if unusually abstract, universal propositions. When, for example, Socrates asked Theaetetus to tell him what knowledge is and Theaetetus replied by mentioning various cases in which we would ordinarily be said to 'have knowledge', Socrates refused to accept this answer even as a starting-point; nothing less would content him than an attempt to state 'the essence of knowledge' by offering a strict definition of it. Yet such a strict definition, Wittgenstein argues, is neither possible nor desirable.

Of course, we could *make* our definitions strict at the cost of arbitrarily ruling that this or that is 'not really knowledge'; but to proceed thus, according to Wittgenstein, is quite to misunderstand the nature of a philosophical issue. For philosophical purposes, in order to find our way out of that tangle of puzzles philosophers have been accustomed to call 'the theory of knowledge', we need to undertake a detailed concrete examination of the cases in which people *actually* use the word 'knowledge' – the roles that word plays in ordinary, everyday language, not in a purified super-refined language. These various roles, according to Wittgenstein, cannot be summed up in a brief formula, a 'strict definition': the words which interest philosophers are 'handyman' words, with a variety of jobs, but no rigidly definable responsibilities. (Quite unlike such a word as 'lithium' which has a narrow, professional job to do.)

But how are these various ways of using the word 'knowledge' linked with one another, we may ask, if not through a formal definition? Look at a concrete case, Wittgenstein exhorts us, to see how word-uses can be linked without being describable in a single comprehensive formula. Consider the word 'game' for example. Board-games have many points in common with card-games, but share only some of these similarities (rigidly-defined rules, for example) with football; ring-a-ring-a-roses has something in common with football, but what with chess? The result of

our survey, Wittgenstein argues, is that 'we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail'. Such a network he calls a 'family'.[2] The 'essence' of a game will consist in these complex, interlacing ways of using the word 'game' – a conclusion Wittgenstein sums up in an epigram: 'essence is expressed by grammar: grammar tells us what kind of object anything is.'

'Grammar' is here a technical expression; there are others in the *Philosophical Investigations*, like 'language-game' and 'criterion'. His readers – and still more his expositors – are disconcerted because Wittgenstein does not pause to explain how he is using these expressions.* This failure to explain, whether justifiable or not, is a direct consequence of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy. Exact definitions would make philosophy look like a species of science; philosophy, as Wittgenstein envisages it, explains nothing, analyses nothing – it simply describes.

Furthermore, he considers, even its descriptions are important only as an ingredient in a process of therapy. Certain features of the way we use words like 'knowledge' generate philosophical disorders, making us feel intellectually dizzy or frustrated. Nothing less can cure us, Wittgenstein thinks, than an exact description of our actual usage, a description which, however, is of no intrinsic interest. 'The philosopher's treatment of a question,' he writes, 'is like the treatment of an illness.' To take a different metaphor: the philosopher shows the bewildered fly how to get out of the bottle into which he has flown. ('The philosopher', in such contexts, means the good philosopher, i.e. the philosopher who makes use of Wittgenstein's methods; most philosophers, he would say, have spread disease rather than cured it, have helped to lure the fly into the bottle.[3])

*Compare Moore's comment: 'I still think he was not using the phrase rules of grammar in any ordinary sense, and I am still unable to form any clear idea as to how he was using it.' And Malcolm: 'With some reluctance I will undertake to say a little bit about the notion of "criterion", a most difficult region in Wittgenstein's philosophy.' See R. Albritton: 'On Wittgenstein's Use of the Term "Criterion"' (*JP*, 1959); C. Wellman: 'Wittgenstein's Conception of a Criterion' (*PR*, 1962); M. Garver *et al.*: 'Wittgenstein on Criterion' in *Knowledge and Experience* (ed. C. D. Rollins, 1964).

If then, we wish to understand Wittgenstein's treatment of a philosophical question, we must first ask ourselves: from what particular temptations is he trying to deliver us? Take his discussion of meaning. Wittgenstein there concentrates his attention on two principal temptations: the first, to regard every word as a name, a temptation which leads us, in Meinong's manner, to postulate mysterious pseudo-entities to serve as the objects of reference for, say, abstract nouns; the second, the temptation to think that 'understanding a word', 'learning a word's meaning', is some sort of mental process, involving the contemplation of what Locke called an 'idea' or Schlick a 'content' – an analysis of meaning which leads inevitably to the puzzles Schlick's writings so abundantly exemplify.[4]

If we keep calm, and look without prejudice at the way words are actually used, Wittgenstein considers, the 'mystery of meaning' will evaporate. We can more easily preserve our balance, he also thinks, if we begin by considering possible, rather than actual, languages. Now this is Carnap's view too, but whereas Carnap's 'possible' languages, as he describes them in *The Logical Syntax of Language*, are complex artificial formulae, calculi, which we could not possibly use in the ordinary affairs of life, Wittgenstein describes a mode of social behaviour – although sometimes the behaviour of an imaginary tribe rather than of a real community – and asks us to consider the sort of language which would be practically useful within such a 'form of life'.[5] Suppose, for example, a builder is working with a labourer: he teaches his labourer to bring him a slab when he says 'Slab!', a brick when he says 'Brick!' and so on. Then this, Wittgenstein thinks, is the kind of language philosophers must have had in mind – he quotes Augustine – when they wrote of language as if it wholly consisted of names.

Such a language, he points out, is obviously very much simpler than the English language; it is of use in far fewer social situations. But furthermore – and this is the fundamental point – even in this simplified language words are not mere names. To understand, say, the word 'slab' is to grasp how it is used in a certain 'language-game' – in this case the 'game' of receiving and giving orders. To obtain this grasp we might have to undertake such procedures as listening to the builder while he points to certain objects and

says '*that* is a slab'. Alternatively, a way of looking at the matter which, Wittgenstein thinks, brings out the fact that a name is a label, the word 'slab' might actually be printed on the slabs; then we should have to learn how to read this word before we could obey the builder's instructions. But such processes – we might call them 'learning the names of objects' – are, according to Wittgenstein, preliminaries to the use of a language, not examples of it. 'Naming is not so far a move in the language-game,' he writes, 'any more than putting a piece in its place on the board is a move in chess.'

'The meaning of "slab", then, does not consist in the objects it names, but in the way it is used in a language.' If the actual slab – the physical object – were part of the meaning of 'slab', Wittgenstein argues, we ought to be able to say things like: 'I broke part of the meaning of the word "slab"', 'I laid a hundred parts of the meaning of the word "slab" today'. Such sentences are obvious nonsense – which helps us to see, Wittgenstein suggests, that the 'naming' theory of meaning is also nonsense. (Wittgenstein's argument at this point is an example of what he regards as an important therapeutical method: 'converting concealed nonsense into *overt* nonsense'.)

In certain special cases, Wittgenstein admits, we might say to somebody: 'the word "slab" means *this* sort of building material', accompanying our remarks by pointing to a slab. But then, he considers, we are talking to someone who already understands our particular language-game, telling him to use the word 'slab' – not the word 'brick' – at a certain point in that game. The 'naming' theory of meaning, Wittgenstein is suggesting, derives its plausibility from those atypical cases in which we are extending our vocabulary within an already familiar language or learning a foreign language, whereas an adequate analysis will have to concentrate its attention upon the ways in which we come to understand *our own* language. Approaching the matter in this way, he thinks, we shall soon see that learning what labels to put on objects is no more 'understanding a language' than repeating words after a teacher is 'speaking a language' – although both labelling and repeating may be useful, or even essential, preliminaries to understanding.

Why had theories of meaning, Wittgenstein asks, placed such

stress on pointing, or 'ostensive definition'? Because philosophers had thought, he answers, that pointing clears matters up, that it takes us beyond the risk of misunderstanding by indicating precisely what is being talked about. But, Wittgenstein argues, there is no way of removing the risk of misunderstanding: we can misunderstand what somebody is pointing at, just as we can misunderstand a formal verbal definition. If, for example, a teacher points to a red square and says 'red', his pupils might conclude that he is telling them the name of a square. Philosophers had supposed – Wittgenstein has particularly in mind the *Tractatus* and Russell's logical atomism – that there must be an 'ultimate analysis' of an expression's meaning, an analysis consisting of simple elements to which we would point in order to make that meaning perfectly clear. But there are no 'simples', he now thinks, in the sense that logical atomism requires them.

For the purposes of a given language-game, he is ready to admit, we can take certain objects to be 'simple' – their names would then be unanalysable elements in our sentences – but such objects are not 'simple' in the metaphysical sense; they are not 'the ultimate constituents of the world'. Russell's search for a 'logical proper' name, a name which should refer to something by nature unanalysable, led him in the end to the conclusion that the demonstrative 'this' is the only name that fills the bill. Yet the word 'this', Wittgenstein points out, is not a name at all. The correct conclusion, he thinks, is that there are *no* logically proper names, from which it follows that the analytic theory of meaning, and with it the view that it is the special task of philosophy to offer ultimate analyses, must be wholly rejected.

What leads us astray? What sends us in search of 'simples' and 'ultimate analyses'? We are accustomed to clear up misunderstandings, Wittgenstein suggests, by substituting a clearer expression for a misleading one. Such a substitute-expression can reasonably be described as an 'analysis' of the original expression. Thus we are led to suppose that there could be a completely exact, crystalline language, one which would contain no expressions except such as are 'ultimate analyses'. In pursuit of this language, he thinks, we are led to ask the sort of question which had preoccupied him in the *Tractatus* – such questions as 'What is the real form of a proposition?', 'What are the constituents

of the ultimate language?' – and so on. We are held captive, driven into metaphysical perplexity, Wittgenstein suggests, by an ideal; his first task, therefore, is to destroy the attractiveness of that ideal. His critics, he knew, would accuse him of destroying whatever is 'great and important'. In fact, he says, he is 'destroying nothing but houses of cards'. And these houses of cards will collapse of their own accord as soon as we come to a clear understanding of 'the ground of language on which they stand' – an understanding of the ways in which we actually use words like 'knowledge', 'proposition', 'name', in our everyday language.

So much, although with none of Wittgenstein's subtlety, for the view that we understand a language if and only if we can point to the objects the words in that language name, whether proximately or ultimately. Now for the harder problem: how to overcome the temptation to suppose that 'understanding' is a mental process. Consider a case where we might say of a person that he 'understands'. Suppose a teacher writes down the series: '3, 9, 27' and then says to his pupil: 'continue!' The pupil writes: '81, 243'. The teacher is content; his pupil understands. Or suppose we watch somebody write '1, 3, 6', and feel puzzled, expecting the '6' to be '5'. Then he writes '10'. The next numbers will be 15, 21', we might say, 'now I understand.'

To such a 'process of understanding', there may be many different accompaniments: we might feel a sense of tension, and then of relief; we might say to ourselves 'the difference increases by one'; we might have mental images of the numbers we expect. But none of these, according to Wittgenstein, is necessary or sufficient for understanding. Even if we normally have visual images when we understand, these images, he argues, could always be replaced by something else – e.g. having a red image could be replaced by looking at a colour chart – without our ceasing to understand. Even if, again, we normally say formulae over to ourselves, it would not affect our understanding if, instead, we said them aloud. On the other side we could have the image, could say a formula to ourselves, and still not understand. Thus, Wittgenstein concludes, 'in the sense in which there are processes (including mental processes) which are characteristic of understanding, understanding is not a mental process'.

'If understanding is not a mental process,' we naturally ask,

'what is it?' Now this is an 'essence' question, to be transformed therefore, on Wittgenstein's general view, into a problem in 'grammar'. He absorbs the special problem about 'understanding' into a more general problem about 'psychological words'. How, he asks, do such words function? How can we possibly tell whether we are or are not using them correctly? These are questions which Wittgenstein sets out to discuss in the latter part of the *Investigations*. But we must not expect to find there a precise and definite answer; that would be quite out of keeping with Wittgenstein's method. His object, once again, is therapeutic; in this case to cure us of our tendency to suppose that psychological words must name 'private experiences which we alone can know' or, as he puts the matter, to imagine that we each of us make use of a private language, the words of which name events in a secret mental life.

The very idea of such a 'private language', Wittgenstein tries to show, is an unintelligible one.[6] A language uses names in accordance with an implicit or explicit *rule*; that it proceeds in accordance with rules is precisely what distinguishes a language from mere noises or from marks on paper. But how are we to tell, Wittgenstein asks, that the names in our private language are used consistently? 'Sensations', 'impressions', or what you will, are, by hypothesis, fleeting; we cannot bring them back to compare them with our present experiences, so as to see whether they ought to be given the same name. It is not enough to reply, Wittgenstein argues, that 'they seem to me to be the same'; the criterion that I am using my language rightly cannot consist in the mere fact that I seem to myself to be doing so. A criterion is used to determine whether what seems to be the case is in fact the case – that is its whole point; 'seeming', then, cannot itself *be* a criterion. The reply 'I remember it to be the same' is in no better case, according to Wittgenstein, unless, as when I claim to remember public events, there is some independent way of checking my memory. Otherwise, to appeal to memory is 'as if someone were to buy several copies of the morning newspaper to assure himself that what it said was true'. There is in fact no criterion for determining whether the so-called 'private language' is being used properly or improperly; and this amounts to saying that *there is no such language.*

Are we to conclude that words *cannot* refer to sensations? That, according to Wittgenstein, would be an absurd conclusion: 'don't we talk about sensations every day and give them names?' The only real question is *how* they refer – in other words, how we *learn to use* sensation words, like, for example, 'pain'. 'Here is one possibility,' he suggests, 'words are connected with the primitive, the natural expressions of the sensation, and are used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain behaviour.'

The possibility Wittgenstein is here contemplating, it should be observed, is that 'I am in pain' *replaces* crying and moaning; even although it has the form of a statement, that is, it is in fact a variety of pain-behaviour rather than a descriptive statement. We might be inclined to reject such an interpretation outright, on the ground that a person always uses language in order to 'convey a thought', to 'express a proposition', or to 'make a judgement'.[7] But this is just what Wittgenstein is contesting: judging, he is saying, is one, but only one, of the very many ways in which we use language. It may turn out, he further suggests, that 'I am in pain' has a different point in different contexts. 'We surely do not always say someone is complaining', he writes, 'because he says he is in pain. So the words "I am in pain" may be a cry of complaint and may be something else.' The crucial point, however, is that they *need not be a statement*. Similar considerations apply to such a 'psychological statement' as 'I am afraid'. If, when we say 'I am afraid', we are asked whether our utterance is a cry of fear, or an attempt to convey how we feel, or a reflection on our present state of mind, sometimes we would give one answer, sometimes another, sometimes we would not know what to say. The question 'What does "I am afraid" really mean?' then, has no straightforward answer. We have always to take account of the context, the language-game, in which the words are uttered. Certainly we cannot presume – and this is the point on which Wittgenstein particularly wants to insist – that whoever makes such an assertion must be 'describing a state of mind'.

Epistemologists have commonly argued that 'I am in pain' describes a 'private state', and have gone on to draw the conclusion that 'only I can *know* I am in pain'. But, Wittgenstein objects, this is clearly not so; it is a matter of everyday experience that other people can know that I am suffering. Indeed, he says, I cannot *know* that I am in pain at all; 'I know that I am in pain' is meaningless. It would make sense, he argues, only if we could contrast 'I know I am in pain' with 'I *rather think* I am in pain', 'I *strongly believe* I am in pain' and so on. Other people can sensibly say of me 'I know he is in pain,' just because, according to Wittgenstein, under other circumstances they can 'rather think' or 'strongly believe' I am in pain, as distinct from 'knowing' that I am – but we can say none of these things of our own pain. I cannot *doubt* whether I am in pain, but it does not follow – quite the contrary – that I can *know* I am in pain.

When a philosopher tells us that we cannot *really* be sure that other people are in pain he must mean, Wittgenstein suggests, something like this: 'Couldn't you imagine the possibility that although he cries, and moans, and groans and . . . still all the time he is only pretending!' Wittgenstein is quite prepared to admit that we can easily *imagine* how one *could* be doubtful in such a case, but not the supposed consequence, that we can never be 'really sure'. One can also imagine, he says, a person who never opens his front door without doubting whether the ground outside the door will be solid – and recognize, as well, that on a particular occasion such a person might in fact step into an abyss; yet *we* do not doubt whether the ground is solid. 'Just try in a real case,' Wittgenstein admonishes us, 'to doubt someone else's fear or pain.' 'But,' somebody may object, 'if you are certain isn't it that you are shutting your eyes in face of doubt?' Wittgenstein's reply is uncompromising: 'They are shut!' We cannot rule out the possibility that we are wrong; but it is *folie de doute* to conclude that we can never be certain.

It had been Wittgenstein's original intention to include as part of *Philosophical Investigations* his final thoughts on the philosophy of mathematics. What he intended to say can in part be gathered from the manuscripts – some of them mere jottings, some relatively well-developed – now published as *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (1956).[8] Discontinuous, obscure, inconsistent, these *Remarks* have by no means received the attention which has been devoted to the *Tractatus* or the *Philosophical*

Investigations. Commentators on Wittgenstein not uncommonly ignore them, and even his more sympathetic critics dismiss large segments – for example, Wittgenstein's lengthy discussion of Gödel's theorem and of the Dedekind cut – as substantially worthless.[9]

Yet the *Remarks* contain many of the most revealing – nowhere is he more radical – of Wittgenstein's 'philosophical remarks'. What, he asks, is the nature of the logical 'must', the necessity attaching to mathematical and logical propositions? Naturally, he rejects any Platonic-type philosophy of mathematics, according to which mathematics discovers the eternal and immutable relationships which hold between timelessly subsistent mathematical objects. Whereas for Russell, and even more obviously for such pure mathematicians as Hardy, the mathematician discerns or discovers mathematical relations, Wittgenstein depicts him as essentially an inventor, not a discoverer. (A typical mathematician, in Wittgenstein's eyes, is the man who invented the decimal notation.)

So far Wittgenstein falls into the conventionalist camp. But conventionalists like Carnap replace the traditional conception of a necessary truth by the conception of a necessary consequence. Mathematical necessity, in their eyes, attaches to a mathematical proposition in virtue of its being the necessary consequence of the adoption of certain axioms, certain definitions, certain rules. Rules, Wittgenstein objects – at this point his *Remarks* overlap with *Philosophical Investigations* – never compel absolutely. Suppose we draw a consequence by means of rules of inference and that consequence is rejected as an inadmissible use of the rule. What determines, Wittgenstein asks, that it is inadmissible? Another rule? Then the same difficulty can arise in the application of *that* rule. No rule can determine of itself how it is to be applied; it does not, as it were, contain within it, only needing to be unfolded, all its applications.

Then are we to say, simply, that the supposed necessity of applying a mathematical rule in a particular way consists in this: we do in fact make use of certain mathematical techniques, we do in fact interpret the instruction 'add 2' in a particular way? That is certainly not, for Wittgenstein, the whole story. For one thing, we are not wholly free to apply or not to apply a mathematical

rule in a particular way. Anyone who acts differently finds himself in difficulties, difficulties of the same sort as he will encounter if he does not accept any way of acting current in his own society. It may properly be said, even, of such a rebel that he 'cannot think', or 'cannot calculate'. But this is because what he does is not what we *call* 'thinking' or 'calculating'; for us it is an 'essential part' of what we call thinking or calculating that it involves, for example, interpreting the order 'add 2' in a particular way. The line between thinking and not thinking, however, is not a 'hard and fast one' – we may change our minds about what we consider as 'thinking' or 'calculating'.

It does not follow, according to Wittgenstein, that the propositions of mathematics are 'anthropological propositions saying how we men infer and calculate'. A mathematical proposition is no more an anthropological proposition than the statute book is a set of anthropological propositions; it is *normative*, not a simple description of what we do. At the same time, we can (in principle) change mathematical rules for practical reasons, just as we can change the laws in a statute book.

What about proofs? A proof, according to Wittgenstein, is a picture, a picture which convinces us that if we follow a certain rule, things will come out in a particular way. When we are convinced by a proof, we work with a new technique. But the same point can be made by saying that we have accepted a new concept, or that we are now treating a relation as an 'internal' one or that, for us, a certain connexion is now a 'grammatical' one. One example Wittgenstein gives is the addition of 200 and 200. If we were to add 200 apples to 200 apples and then count 400 apples, this would not serve, he argues, as a proof that 200 + 200 = 400. Mathematical propositions cannot be proved experimentally. One needs for a proof – it will be obvious that Wittgenstein uses the word 'proof' is an unusually broad sense – a picture which includes the fact that the apples *behave normally*, i.e. that none of them is lost or conjoined in the process of adding them up. Such a picture gives us the concept of 'counting 200 and 200 objects together'; it convinces us of a grammatical proposition about 'counting', it shows us the essence of 'counting together'. As an expression of this result we 'accept a rule'. We have not, in accepting the rule, acquired a new piece of

knowledge. Rather, we have come to a decision, the decision to adopt a particular technique.

In its general approach, Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics is 'finitist' or 'constructivist', in Brouwer's manner. However, he does not regard himself as a finitist, any more than he regards himself as a behaviourist. Finitism and behaviourism, he says, are alike in wanting to reach a conclusion of the form 'but surely, all we have here is . . .' They both 'deny the existence of something' – consciousness or infinite sets – in order to escape from a confusion. In contrast, Wittgenstein hopes to escape from confusion by asking what *point* there is in using such an expression as 'private feelings' or 'infinite sets'.

Similarly, in his discussion of those paradoxes which were for Russell, Frege and their followers the clinching evidence that something was wrong with a calculus, Wittgenstein's approach is, in general terms, pragmatic. He does not at all deny that a contradiction *can* be important; it can involve us in practical difficulties. What he wholly rejects is the doctrine that we cannot regard a calculus as 'trustworthy' unless we can prove it to be free of contradictions. Suppose a contradiction were discovered in arithmetic, he asks, would that demonstrate that we were wrong to have relied on arithmetic all these years past? Does it matter that arithmetic, any more than it matters that English, allows us to say something paradoxical? Only, he suggests, at the points at which it *does* matter. The Russellian contradiction about classes, for example, emerges only within what is already a 'cancerous growth' on mathematics; it does not affect the trustworthiness of any useful mathematical or logical technique. What mathematical propositions stand in need of, what the philosopher of mathematics can hope to provide, is not a foundation 'to prove mathematics free from contradictions' but, rather, a conceptual analysis which will enable us to understand 'the nature of their grammar', how they are useful to us in our thinking.

In general, Wittgenstein's pupils followed the example of their master during his years of silence: it is quite obvious that he did not care to have his views reported at secondhand. But there were Cambridge philosophers, of whom the best-known is John Wisdom,[10] who worked out in their own way what they had learnt

from Wittgenstein – and from Moore – thereby keeping open lines of communication between Cambridge and the outside world.

Unlike many other contemporary philosophers, Wisdom is deeply interested in art, religion and personal relationships, about all of which he has made illuminating remarks. Perhaps that explains why, in some measure, he is sympathetic towards metaphysics; nobody who takes literature (or psycho-analysis) seriously is likely to succumb to the doctrine that whatever is worth saying can be said clearly and precisely, or to be satisfied that only true statements can be illuminating. Wisdom hopes to show that metaphysics can be valuable without reverting to the pre-positivist doctrine that it provides us with a description of supra-empirical entities.

In order to bring out the special character of metaphysical controversies, Wisdom distinguishes between three different types of dispute. 'Empirical' disputes – e.g. a controversy about the inflammability of helium – are, he says, settled by observation and experiment, 'logical' disputes by reference to a 'strict rule of usage'. Thus to settle the dispute whether '$2 + 2 = 4$' is a rule, we need only point out, he argues, that a 'rule' cannot, in strict usage, be either true or false, whereas a mathematical proposition can be either. Suppose, however, somebody sets the following problem: 'if when a dog attacks a cow she keeps her horns always towards it, revolving as fast as the dog rotates, does the dog go around the cow?'[11] Then it is no use referring to the ordinary way of using 'around'; this, according to Wisdom, is a 'conflict' dispute, which can be resolved only by establishing a new convention – by deciding to use, or not to use, 'around' in these circumstances.

The queer thing about philosophers, Wisdom suggests, is that they hold views which, considered from the point of view of strict logic, are obviously false. They go on telling us that the laws of mathematics are really rules of grammar, even after we point out to them that a rule cannot be either true or false; they still insist that material objects do not exist even when, in Moore's manner, we hold up our hand and say: 'There, that's a material object.' How can we account for their blatant refusal to accept the regular methods of settling a dispute? The fact is, Wisdom suggests, that

philosophers are *dissatisfied* with our ordinary usage, and so will not accept as decisive an appeal to it. They are advocating a linguistic innovation; where we see a 'logical' dispute, they see a 'conflict'.

The philosopher's obduracy is valuable, Wisdom thinks, in so far as it draws attention to a similarity we should otherwise overlook. Suppose a psychologist says: 'Everybody is neurotic.' We might at first imagine that this proposition expresses an empirical discovery, to the effect that more careful psychiatric observation will always reveal a neurosis where, at first sight, none appears to be present – as a pathologist might discover that every living organism has cancerous cells within it. But we should miss the whole point of the psychologist's statement, Wisdom suggests, if we were to reply: 'that isn't true, a careful investigation has shown that only 14% of the population has a neurosis', i.e. if we were to regard it as an empirical proposition, to be combatted at that level. For even if it is suggested by the discovery that the neurotic and the non-neurotic are less easily distinguishable than is ordinarily supposed, 'everybody is neurotic', according to Wisdom, is *a priori*, not empirical: the psychologist is recommending that we change our way of using the word 'neurotic'. We can 'dispute' what he says only by drawing attention to the inconvenient results of his verbal recommendation. Similarly, Wisdom thinks, if a philosopher tells us that 'all mathematical statements are rules of grammar', the bare response: 'Of course, they are not rules', while true, misses the point; the proper reply is rather: 'Yes, I see they are like rules in some ways but ...' Then we have not missed the illumination the philosopher's paradox can cast.

What recommendations, we might ask, fall particularly within the philosopher's province? To what similarities does he wish particularly to draw attention? The traditional reply, Wisdom suggests, would run something like this: the philosopher interrelates realms of being – material objects and sense-data, facts and values. But this reply may mislead us into believing that there are strange entities – 'sense-data', 'values' and the like – which the philosopher has to relate to facts, as the medical scientist might relate viruses to diseases. It will be less misleading, according to Wisdom, to think of the philosopher as one who

'describes the logic' of different classes of sentences – tells us how they are verified, supported by reasons, argued about. A philosopher can profitably discuss 'the different logics' of 'this is red', 'Napoleon was a man', 'Mr Pickwick was a good man', whereas he will be led completely astray into the wilds of metaphysics or the deserts of logical analysis if he sets out to consider 'the relation between fictional and real beings' or 'the difference between facts and values'.

The similarities in which the philosopher is interested, then, are similarities and dissimilarities in the use of sentences. His paradoxes are useful, Wisdom considers, just in virtue of the light they throw on these similarities. When, for example, the positivist tell us that 'metaphysical propositions are meaningless', his paradox usefully draws attention to differences between the logic of scientific and the logic of philosophical assertions; when he maintains that 'we can never really know that other people have minds' he helps us to see that we do not verify statements about other people's minds in the same way as we verify statements about chairs and tables – a point Wisdom illustrates at length in his articles on 'Other Minds'. Yet, Wisdom admits, it is difficult to account in these terms for the peculiar excitement and intensity of metaphysical disputes. Why should verbal recommendations engender such heat? Faced with this problem, Wisdom turns for help to one of his special interests, psycho-analysis.[12] Listening to philosophers who obstinately persist in such assertions as 'we can never really know what other people think and feel', we are at once reminded, he considers, of the neurotic's chronic doubts. 'In the labyrinth of metaphysics,' he writes in a characteristic passage, 'are the same whispers as one hears when climbing Kafka's staircases to the tribunal which is always one floor higher up.' The philosopher thinks of himself as striving towards a goal – towards, for example, the *direct* apprehension of other people's minds – even when, as in the neurotic's case, no conceivable experience would persuade him that he had reached his goal. But if we forget about the goal, Wisdom suggests, and think of the philosopher's work as a re-description of the point he has already reached, we shall see in what its true value consists.

My account of Wisdom's philosophical position is, in one important respect, misleading. I have made him out to be more

definite, more explicit, than he actually is. His characteristic method consists in first making a distinction – say, the distinction between a 'logical' and a 'conflict' dispute – as if it were a sharp one, and then blunting its edges; or first making an assertion – say, that philosophical paradoxes are verbal recommendations – and then asserting its contradictory. 'I have said that philosophers' questions and theories are really verbal,' he wrote in his paper on 'Philosophical Perplexity' (*PAS*, 1936), 'but if you like we will not say this, or we will also say the contradictory.' Wisdom's elusiveness is not merely freakish or irresponsible; it flows from his firm conviction that philosophical theories are at once illuminating and misleading, *and that both these points need to be made.* There is no hope of transcending this awkward situation and thus arriving at philosophical conclusions which cannot mislead; all the philosopher can do is to mislead and then – elaborately – to draw attention to the points at which what he has said is misleading – and not misleading.

In his introduction to M. Lazerowitz's collection of essays, *The Structure of Metaphysics* (1955), Wisdom remarks that 'when people listened to Wittgenstein they often found it difficult to get a steady light giving an ordered view of what they have wished to see and that when they now read him they still have this difficulty.' Not a few readers would feel the same about Wisdom's own writings; but the general tendency of recent post-Wittgenstein philosophy, one might say, is to revert to definiteness, if in a spirit chastened by Wittgenstein's critique. We can see that tendency clearly enough in Lazerowitz's book; he operates with Wisdom's main thesis – that philosophical paradoxes are verbal recommendations, backed by unconscious motives – as if it were a scientific theory to be verified by applying it to a variety of philosophical disputes.[13] Wisdom is obviously uneasy about the result; he wants to add: 'Yes, but on the other side . . .'

For similar reasons – because they find them insufficiently subtle, over-explicit – not all ex-students of Wittgenstein look with kindness on the 'ordinary language' philosophies[14] which have latterly dominated the philosophical scene at Oxford, for all that they show clear signs of Wittgenstein's influence. At Oxford, Wittgenstein's ideas entered a very different philosophical atmosphere from that which prevailed at Cambridge. Oxford

philosophers, for the most part, have learnt their philosophy as part of a course of study which is based upon classical scholarship; in particular, the influence of Aristotle has been strong at Oxford as it has never been at Cambridge, where in so far as any classical philosopher has been influential it is Plato, not Aristotle – and this is as true of Wittgenstein as it is of Moore.

Now when Aristotle considers such a question as 'whether the virtues are emotions', he makes use of what it would be natural to call 'an appeal to ordinary language'. The virtues are not emotions, he argues, since '*we are not called* good or bad on the ground that we exhibit certain emotions but only in respect of our virtues and vices'; again, he argues, an emotion *is said to* 'move' us whereas a virtue or vice *is said to* 'govern' us. What 'we say', then, is the decisive factor. Arguments of this sort are everywhere to be found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and were freely employed by the most influential Oxford Aristotelians. Cook Wilson, as we have already seen, always laid great stress on the importance of determining 'the normal idiom'; in the ethical writings of W. D. Ross – in sharp contrast to Moore's *Principia Ethica* – the appeal to 'what the ordinary man would say' plays a conspicuous part. Add to these special influences the quite general consideration that classically-trained men are always likely to place great stress on 'correctness', which has a reasonably definite meaning within a dead language, and it will no longer seem surprising that 'ordinary language' philosophies made such rapid headway at Oxford. At Oxford, then, Wittgenstein's ideas were grafted on to an Aristotelian-philological stock; the stock has influenced the resultant fruits which, amongst other things, are considerably drier and cooler than their Cambridge counterparts.

Oxford philosophy displays, too – most notably in the writings of J. L. Austin – an interest in language for its own sake, quite foreign to Wittgenstein. A study of 'the use' of words like 'mind', 'knowledge', 'perception', so a good many Oxford philosophers think, is interesting in itself, quite apart from its therapeutic, antimetaphysical, powers. Philosophy for them has a positive and systematic task; in the eyes of many of the Cambridge 'old guard' of Wittgensteinians, Oxford philosophy has desiccated into scholasticism.

The best known of Oxford 'ordinary language' philosophers is Gilbert Ryle. Ryle was educated in the Cook Wilson tradition; Aristotle is always his natural point of departure. But he was also interested in continental philosophy, at first in Husserl and Meinong, later in the logical positivists. He is a trained academic philosopher, as Wittgenstein was not – a philosopher 'in the tradition', whatever his unorthodoxies. That is one reason why his ideas have been widely discussed, even by philosophers who can 'make nothing' of Wittgenstein.

In his 'Systematically Misleading Expressions' (*PAS*, 1931 and *LL* I) Ryle announced his conversion – although, he said, a reluctant one – to the view that the task of philosophy is 'the detection of the sources in linguistic idioms of recurrent misconstructions and absurd theories'. Distinguishing – like Bradley, Frege and Russell – between the syntactical form of an expression and the form of the facts it depicts, Ryle argues that a great many of the expressions of everyday life are, in virtue of their grammatical form, 'systematically misleading'. Merely because, for example, a sentence like 'Mr Pickwick is a fiction' is grammatically analogous to 'Mr Menzies is a statesman', we are tempted to read it as if it were a description of a person – a person with the property of being fictitious. In fact, however, this statement is not about a fictitious person, Mr Pickwick, with odd properties but about a *real* person, Dickens, or a *real* book *Pickwick Papers*. How is this to be shown, if the point be not immediately granted? If 'Mr Pickwick is a fiction' were about a person by the name of 'Mr Pickwick', then, Ryle argues, it would imply such propositions as 'Mr Pickwick was born in such-and-such a year' – consequences which *actually contradict* the original assertion. 'Paradoxes and antinomies,' he more generally concludes, 'are the evidence that an expression is systematically misleading.'

Ryle willingly grants that such expressions as '... is a fiction' do not mislead us in everyday life. But metaphysicians, with their special interest in 'the structure of facts' or 'the categories of being', are enticed into their strange theories because they take the grammatical forms of statements at their face value. They are led to believe that there are 'universals' – remember that Ryle had been reading Meinong and Husserl – because they wrongly presume that 'Punctuality is a virtue' is grammatically parallel to

'Hume is a philosopher', i.e. that like 'Hume', 'Punctuality' is a name. Or again, merely because we can sensibly say 'the idea of taking a holiday has just occurred to me', philosophers are led to conclude that there is an entity – 'the idea' – which the phrase 'the idea of taking a holiday' names.

To avoid the misleading suggestions of everyday speech, Ryle argued, the philosopher must learn to restate sentences – in the manner of Russell's theory of descriptions, which for Ryle as for Ramsey was 'the paradigm of philosophy' – so as clearly to exhibit 'the form of the facts into which philosophy is the inquiry'. 'Philosophical analysis', he thought, issues in such reformulations. Obviously, Ryle held both that philosophy is therapeutic and that it has a positive task – to reveal 'the real form of facts'. 'Systematically Misleading Expressions', in fact, belongs to the first Wittgenstein period, the period which culminated in Wisdom's 'Logical Constructions'. That an Oxford man, at a time when Cook Wilson's followers held the centre of the stage at Oxford, should proceed in a manner so obviously 'Cambridge' was a portent. (Although Price, it should be remembered, has already created some dismay at Oxford by sympathizing with Russell's theory of sense-data.)

Ryle wrote a considerable number of philosophical articles in the years that followed. Two of them are especially important for an understanding of *The Concept of Mind* – 'Categories' (*PAS*, 1937) and his inaugural lecture *Philosophical Arguments* (1945). In his 'Categories' Ryle defined 'a category' in a way which, he thinks, preserves whatever was of value in Aristotle and Kant, while laying down, as they did not, a definite way of proving that two expressions differ in category.[15] Consider such an incomplete expression (a 'sentence-frame') as '... is in bed'. Then, Ryle argues, we can without absurdity insert 'Jones' or 'Socrates' in the gap the sentence-frame leaves unfilled, but not 'Saturday'. This is enough to prove that 'Jones' belongs to a different category from 'Saturday'.[16] It still does not prove, however, that 'Jones' and 'Socrates' belong to the *same* category; for there might be other sentence-frames, Ryle says, into which 'Jones' could be inserted but 'Socrates' would not fit without absurdity. Thus although either 'he' or 'the writer of this book' can be inserted in '... has read Aristotle' they nevertheless

belong to different categories; for only 'he' – not 'the writer of this book' – will fit without absurdity into the sentence-frame '... has never written a book'.

In such a case, Ryle thinks, the absurdity resulting from the inappropriate completion of a sentence-frame is obvious; but it is *not* obvious, in contrast, that we shall fall into antinomies and contradictions if we fill the gap in '... is false' by the phrase 'the statement I am now making'. Such un-obvious absurdities are the philosophically interesting ones.[17] Indeed philosophers, Ryle thinks, are led systematically to distinguish between categories only because they light on unexpected antinomies; then they go on to seek out concealed antinomies in cases where they suspect that a category-distinction lies concealed.

Two general characteristics of Ryle's paper on 'Categories' are important for the understanding of his philosophical point of view: first, that although he talks throughout of 'expressions' – he will not allow that either a belief or a concept can properly be described as 'absurd' – he is not, he says, conducting a philological investigation; he is telling us something about 'the nature of things' or, at least, about 'concepts'. He has continued to stress this point; many critics who are otherwise sympathetically inclined towards his work complain that his conclusions are misleadingly expressed in the 'material' rather than in the 'formal' mode.[18] Secondly, category-distinguishing, as Ryle describes it, involves philosophical argument, ratiocination: a point overlooked, he suggests, by those who define philosophy as 'analysis'.

To this theme his inaugural address was devoted. Philosophical arguments, he says, are neither inductions nor demonstrations; the philosopher has his own methods of procedure, of which the most characteristic is the *reductio ad absurdum*. By 'deducing from a proposition or complex of propositions consequences which are inconsistent with each other or with the original propositions' the philosopher demonstrates the 'absurdity' of the proposition or complex of propositions in question. Ryle is not suggesting that philosophical arguments are purely destructive. The *reductio ad absurdum*, on his view, acts as a sieve; or, to vary the metaphor, by determining the boundaries at which absurdity appears it outlines the actual field of application of a proposition.

Every proposition, Ryle says, has certain 'logical powers'. For the most part, he thinks, we are conscious only of a limited number of the logical powers of the propositions we use, and so have only a 'partial grasp' of their meaning. Yet we can use propositions like '$3 \times 3 = 9$' or 'London is north of Brighton' without falling into those arithmetical or geographical errors which would be evidence that we did not understand what we were saying; if we cannot state the rules which govern the use of these propositions, at least we know how to use them in practice under ordinary circumstances. If this were not so, Ryle says, the philosopher would have no starting-point.

When propositions have something in common, it is sometimes convenient, Ryle thinks, to abstract this common factor as a 'concept'. Thus, for example, from the set of such propositions as 'Jones behaves intelligently', 'Brown thinks intelligently', we might wish to pick out 'the concept of intelligence'. Moore, in his earlier writings, had written as if a concept were a building-block out of which propositions are constructed; Ryle argues, in opposition to Moore, that a concept is merely a handy abbreviation for a 'family' of propositions. When, then, Ryle goes on to talk of 'a concept's logical powers' this is intended as a brief way of referring to the logical powers of all those propositions which are similar in virtue of possessing a certain common factor.

The Concept of Mind (1949) analyses the logical powers of 'mental concepts'.[19] In everyday life, he thinks, we work quite well with these concepts: we know how to decide, say, whether Jones is intelligent or stupid, whether he is making a joke or thinking out a problem. But we become puzzled when we try to discover the category to which such expressions belong, i.e. the logical powers of the propositions into which they enter. To overcome our puzzles, Ryle suggests, we have to 'map' the various mental concepts, thus determining their geographical position in a world of concepts – in other words, the limits of their application.

First, however, a myth has to be destroyed: the 'official', or Cartesian, myth that mental-conduct expressions refer to a queer sort of entity, 'mind' or 'soul', distinguishable from the body in virtue of being private, non-spatial, knowable only by introspection. Recognizing that words like 'intelligence' do not name

entities which obey mechanical laws, philosophers have been led to conclude, Ryle suggests, that they must therefore name entities which obey non-mechanical, spiritual laws. In fact, however, it is a 'category mistake' to suppose that they name *any entity whatsoever*. The function of the word 'intelligence' is to describe human behaviour, not to name an entity. According to Descartes and the epistemologists who followed in his footsteps, a human being is compounded of two disparate entities – a mind and a body, a ghost and a machine.[20] Then at once the epistemologists are beset by a host of problems: How can an immaterial spirit influence the workings of a material body? How can the ghost peer through the machine to the world around it? To such questions as these, Ryle thinks, there can be no answer; yet we must not try to avoid them by maintaining, with the Idealist, that in reality man is a ghost, or with the materialist, that in reality he is a machine. The human being is neither a ghost, nor a machine, nor a ghost in a machine; he is a human being, who sometimes behaves intelligently and sometimes stupidly, sometimes notices things and sometimes overlooks them, sometimes acts and sometimes is quiescent. 'Man need not be degraded to a machine,' Ryle writes, 'by being denied to be a ghost in a machine. He might, after all, be a sort of animal, namely a higher mammal. There has yet to be ventured the hazardous leap to the hypothesis that perhaps he is a man.'

Philosophers have tended to suppose that 'acting intelligently' is synonymous with 'theorizing' or 'discovering the truth'. Since thinking is usually carried on in private – once we have learnt the trick in childhood – it is then an easy step to the conclusion that every exercise of intelligence belongs to a secret, private, world. But in fact, Ryle argues, theorizing is only a *species* of intelligent behaviour – the species he calls 'knowing that'; most intelligent action consists in 'knowing how' to carry through some action to its conclusion, 'knowing how' to play a game, or to speak French, or to build a house, which is very different from *theorizing* about games, or about language-speaking, or about house-building. If, indeed, we try to maintain that practice *can* be intelligent only when it is preceded by intelligent thinking, we are at once involved, Ryle argues, in an infinite regress; if there were any good reason for supposing that intelligent cricket-playing must be preceded by intelligent theorizing about cricket, there would be exactly as much reason for supposing that intelligent theorizing must in its turn be preceded by intelligent theorizing about theorizing, and so on *ad infinitum*. At some stage – and why not at once? – we have to recognize that a form of activity is intelligent, whatever precedes it or fails to precede it.

But, the objection may be raised, we cannot tell by bare inspection of an act that it is intelligent; it might be a mere fluke. The worst of chess-players will occasionally make a truly formidable move. For that reason, Ryle grants, we have to 'look beyond' the isolated act in order to determine whether it displays 'intelligence'. This 'look beyond', however, does not consist in trying to penetrate to a secret, intelligent mental performance – which is, indeed, by hypothesis quite inaccessible to us. Rather, we inquire into the agent's general abilities and propensities. Does he make similar moves in similar situations? Can he appreciate such moves when they are made by others? Can he tell us why he made the move? If the answer to such questions as these is in the affirmative, then he 'knows how' to play chess.

'Knowing how,' Ryle concludes, is 'dispositional.' He is not suggesting, in thus describing it, that it is the name of a special sort of entity – a 'disposition'. The proposition 'glass has a disposition to break', he argues, is shorthand for a (vaguely-limited) range of hypothetical propositions: 'if you drop glass, or hit it with a stone, or try to bend it, it will break.' If glass never did break, if there were in our experience no 'episodes' of glass-breaking, then, no doubt, we should not call it 'breakable'; in thus describing it, all the same, we are not naming an episode but stating hypothetical propositions.[21] Similarly, then, although we should say of a person that 'he can read French' only if he sometimes performs the sort of action we expect of French-readers, or that he is irritable only if he sometimes gets angry, or that he is 'amiable' only if he is sometimes friendly, there is no particular episode the occurrence of which is a necessary and sufficient condition for the application to a person of these dispositional descriptions.* To look for the entity, or the episode, named by a

*Compare what Wittgenstein says about 'understanding' (p. 430 above).

disposition is to hunt the unicorn. To say we have a certain disposition, in Ryle's view, is to assert, simply, that our conduct is 'law-like', i.e. that it follows a regular pattern.

Ryle's analysis of motives proceeds along similar lines: acting with a motive, he suggests, is like acting from habit – as comes out in the fact that we are often uncertain whether a particular person has acted 'from habit' or 'with a certain motive'. Just as to ascribe an action to 'the force of habit' is not to unveil its secret cause but to deny that it is peculiar or unexpected, so also to ascribe a motive to an action is merely to subsume it under a general type, as distinct from causally explaining it. To 'act from ambition' is to exemplify the ambitious sort of action; 'ambition' is not a peculiar non-mechanical cause.[22]

As for such so-called 'mental processes' as 'acts of volition', these, Ryle argues, are not in the least like 'processes'. None of the ordinary ways of describing processes is in this case applicable: it is useless to ask whether volitions are continuous or interrupted, how they can be speeded up or slowed down, when they begin and when they end. The difference between voluntary and involuntary behaviour does not lie in the fact that voluntary behaviour is preceded, whereas involuntary behaviour is not preceded, by an 'act of volition'.

Similarly, although there is certainly a difference between seeing and not-seeing, recalling and not-recalling, there are no 'mental processes', Ryle argues, properly describable as 'acts of seeing' or 'acts of recalling'. 'Seeing' and 'recalling', indeed, are 'achievement-words', not 'process' words; to 'see' is to succeed in a task – it is parallel to *winning* a race, as distinct from *running* in one. If Moore was puzzled by the elusiveness of 'mental acts', this is for the very good reason that he was looking for what is not there to be found.

Many philosophers who are in general sympathy with Ryle's demolition of the Cartesian myth have boggled at his analysis of imagination.[23] Yet this analysis is vital to his general thesis that 'when we characterize people by mental predicates, we are not making untestable inferences to any ghostly processes occurring in streams of consciousness which we are debarred from visiting; we are describing the ways in which those people conduct parts of their predominantly public behaviour'. He has to show that

'imagining' is not the process of contemplating a class of intrinsically private entities – 'images'. Just as, he argues, to pretend to commit a murder is not *really* to commit a queer sort of murder (a 'mock-murder') so, equally, to 'imagine' seeing Everest is not *really* to see an 'Everest image'. If somebody imagines seeing Everest there is neither a real mountain in front of his real eyes, nor a mock-mountain in front of mock-eyes; he is utilizing his knowledge of Everest so as to 'think how it would look'. Imagining, Ryle contends, may be a form of rehearsing – anticipating the future – or it may be a form of pretending, but it is certainly not an 'inner seeing'. In so far as rehearsing and pretending are *in principle* public so, too, is imagining. Thus the inner bastion of privacy – the 'world of images' – proves, after all, not to be impregnable.

In *The Concept of Mind* Ryle reformulated and solved in his own way some of the problems in philosophical psychology which had perturbed Wittgenstein; his *Dilemmas* turns to another of Wittgenstein's main themes: the problem how we are to overcome the apparently irresolvable dilemmas which beset the philosopher. The philosopher is confronted, often enough, by two conclusions, each of them reached, it would seem, by an impeccable chain of reasoning, yet so related that one of them must be wholly wrong if the other is only partly right. Considering in turn a number of such dilemmas, Ryle tries to show that in each case the conflict is only an apparent one – a pseudo-conflict between theories which are 'in a different line of business', and stand in no need, for that reason, of being reconciled.

Take, for example, the familiar problem how the world of science is related to 'the world of everyday life'. On the one side, the physicist assures us that things are really arrangements of electrons in space, that they are not 'really' coloured, solid or sharply-defined; on the other side, we are quite convinced that chairs and tables are real and that they really have the colour, the solidity, the shape, we ordinarily ascribe to them. How is this dilemma to be resolved? The conclusions of the physicist, Ryle tries to show, do not really conflict with our everyday judgements, so that the supposed dilemma turns out to be no more than a difference in interest.

He makes his point by means of an analogy. A College auditor

may tell an undergraduate that the College accounts 'cover the whole life of the College' – its games, its entertainments, its teachings are all there depicted. The auditor is not deceiving the undergraduate, for indeed the accounts are comprehensive, accurate and exhaustive. Yet the undergraduate is convinced that the accounts 'leave something out'. That, Ryle thinks, is precisely our position *vis-à-vis* the physicist. Any physical change can be represented as a movement of electrons; in that respect physics is 'complete'. Yet, somehow, the world we love and fear has escaped the physicist's net.

The undergraduate, Ryle suggests, should look more closely at the auditor's claim that his accounts 'cover the whole life of the College'. No doubt they do, in the sense that every College activity is represented in the account books as a debit or a credit; but his accounts do not describe, do not even attempt to describe, precisely those features of College life which the undergraduate finds so fascinating. For the accountant, a new library book is a debit of twenty-five shillings, not the precious life-blood of a master spirit. Similarly, Ryle argues, although physics covers everything, it does not give a complete description of what it covers. The physicist is interested only in certain aspects of the world around us. Just as the accountant has his business and the undergraduate a different business, so the physicist has a different business again. Each can go on his way, according to Ryle, without any fear of meeting a dilemma around the corner. This doctrine of 'spheres of influence' has recently attracted a good many admirers, particularly amongst those who desire to be uncritically religious without ceasing to be critically philosophical.[24]

Ryle, we said, always insists that his work is not in the least philological; and certainly, he does not engage in close linguistic analyses. For such analyses we must look to the work of J. L. Austin[25] who, until his premature death in 1960, exercised in post-war Oxford an intellectual authority nothing short of remarkable. Even amongst his closest associates, however, there is more than a little controversy about what Austin was trying to do and its relevance to the traditional pursuits of philosophy.

One thing is clear: at no time did Austin believe, as he is not uncommonly supposed to have believed, that 'ordinary language'

is for all philosophical purposes the final court of appeal. 'Our common stock of words,' he certainly wrote in 'A Plea for Excuses' (*PAS*, 1957), 'embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connexions they have found worth making, in the life-times of many generations'. In relation to everyday practical matters, he therefore thought, the distinctions which ordinary language incorporates are likely to be sounder than 'any that you and I are likely to think up in our arm-chairs of an afternoon'. They are to be neglected at our peril; if not the end-all, they are certainly the 'begin-all' of philosophy.

But he freely admits that even although 'as a preliminary' the philosopher must track down in detail our ordinary use of words, in the end he will always be compelled 'to straighten them out to some degree'. The ordinary man's authority, furthermore, extends only to practical affairs. Whenever the philosopher's interests are 'more intellectual and extensive' than those of the ordinary man it will be necessary to point to new distinctions, to invent a new terminology – as Austin himself did with extreme, even excessive, freedom.

Austin's lecture on 'Ifs and Cans' (*PBA*, 1956) will serve to illustrate both the subtlety of the grammatical distinctions he was accustomed to make and the two rather different views he took about the philosophical importance of such distinctions. In that lecture he set out to dispute Moore's analysis of 'could have' in his *Ethics*. Moore wrongly suggests, according to Austin, first, that 'could have' simply means 'could have if I had chosen'; secondly, that for 'could have if I had chosen' may properly be substituted 'should have if I had chosen': thirdly – this by implication rather than expressly – that the *if*-clauses in these revised statements refer to a causal condition.

In opposition to Moore, Austin tries to show that it is a mistake to suppose that 'should' can be substituted for 'could'; that the *if* in such statements as 'I can if I choose' is not the *if* of condition but some other *if*, perhaps the *if* of stipulation; and that the supposition that 'could have' means 'could have if I had chosen' rests on the false presumption that 'could have' is always a past conditional or subjective, whereas it may be – and in the relevant cases in fact is – the past indicative of the verb 'can'. (At this point, Austin takes his evidence from Latin as well as from

English.) By means of such arguments he concludes that Moore was mistaken in supposing that determinism might be consistent with what 'we ordinarily say and presumably think'.[26] But Austin tells us that, rather than shows us how, this general philosophical conclusion follows.

Part of the 'importance' of what he is doing, according to Austin, derives from the fact that 'if' and 'can' are words which constantly turn up in philosophy – especially, perhaps, at those points at which the philosopher fondly imagines that his problems have been solved – so that it is vital to be clear about their use. By studying such linguistic distinctions we become clearer about the phenomena they are used to differentiate; 'ordinary-language philosophy' would be better called, he suggests, 'linguistic phenomenology'.

But he goes on to make another point, which gradually came, one suspects, to be nearer to his heart. Philosophy has commonly been the breeding-ground of sciences; perhaps, Austin conjectures, it is on the point of giving birth to a new science of language as it has recently given birth to mathematical logic. Austin clearly hoped to act as one of the midwives of such a science. Following James and Russell, Austin even suggests that a question is philosophical just in so far as it is in a state of confusion; once men are clear about a problem it ceases to form part of philosophy and is converted into a question for science.[27] Perhaps that is why he is prepared to assert, as he does more than once, that over-simplification is not so much the occupational disease of philosophers as their occupation, and why he is willing, too, to condemn the mistakes of philosophers in such unrestrained epithets as, for example, 'extraordinarily perverse', 'not even faintly sensible', 'grossly exaggerated'. These are all, it would seem, the trade-marks of philosophy, as distinct from a merely personal weakness of some particular philosopher.

Austin's polemical style is most fully deployed in *Sense and Sensibilia*. His shafts are particularly directed against A. J. Ayer's *Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* (1940), but Price's *Perception* (1932) and G. J. Warnock's *Berkeley* (1953) do not go unscathed. Austin chose those particular books for consideration, so he told his undergraduate audience, for their merits and not for their defects, because they provide 'the best available exposition'

of a view which is 'at least as old as Heraclitus'. But their merits Austin scarcely made visible. He announced his intention of exposing 'a mass of seductive (mainly verbal) fallacies' and 'a wide variety of concealed motives' and he did so with relish – although not always, perhaps, with complete fairness.[28]

Austin hoped to destroy two doctrines: the first, that what we 'directly perceive' are sense-data[29] and the second that propositions about sense-data serve as the incorrigible foundations of knowledge. To achieve the first end, he is content for the most part to attack the classical argument from illusion. That argument, he suggests, fails to distinguish between *illusions* and *delusions* – as if in an illusion, as in a delusion, we were 'seeing something', in this case a sense-datum. But in fact when we look at a straight stick in water we see a stick, not a sense-datum; if under those very special circumstances the stick sometimes looks rather like a bent stick this need not perturb us.

As for incorrigibility, Austin argues that there are no propositions whose nature it is to be 'the foundation of knowledge' – propositions which by their very nature are incorrigible, directly verifiable, and evidence-providing. Nor, on the other side, do 'material-object statements' need to be 'based on evidence'. We need, in general, no evidence that there is a book on the table; on the other side, we may, taking another look, come to doubt whether we were correct in saying that the book 'looks heliotrope'.

Austin does not seriously raise the general question why the sense-datum theory in one or the other of its many varieties has had, as he himself emphasizes, so long and honourable a philosophical career. In particular, Austin says nothing whatever about that argument from physics – from the disparity between things as we ordinarily take them to be and things as the physicist describes them – which many epistemologists have thought to be the most fundamental of all arguments for sense-data.[30] He turns his attention, rather, to such questions as the precise functioning of the word 'real', which in phrases like 'the real colour' has played a very large part in sense-datum theories. 'Real,' he argues, is not at all a normal word – a word, that is, which has a single, specifiable meaning. Nor is it ambiguous. It is, he says, 'substantive-hungry' – it cannot stand alone as a description, as

'pink' can, but like 'good' only has meaning in the context of 'a real such-and-such'; it is a 'trouser-word' – it excludes the possibility of something's *not* being real, in any of a variety of possible ways; it is a 'dimension-word', in the sense that it is, again like 'good', the most general of a set of words all of which perform much the same function – words such as 'proper', 'genuine', 'authentic'; it is an 'adjuster-word' permitting us to cope with new and unforeseen situations, without inventing a special new term. Such discriminations are highly relevant, in general terms, to the issues which Austin is ostensibly discussing, but they come at Austin's hands to have a life of their own, not as a mere propaedeutic to, or instrument in, the criticism of sense-data theories.

Of all Austin's writings, his contribution to a symposium on 'Other Minds' has won the most unqualified acclaim.[31] In particular the analogy it incorporates between 'knowing' and 'promising' – usually formulated by saying that 'knowing' is a performative word – has come to be thought of as, unmistakably, a major contribution to philosophy.[32] Knowing, it had not uncommonly been presumed, is the name of a special mental state and to assert that 'I know that S is P', therefore, is to assert that I am in that mental state in relation to 'S is P'. This doctrine, Austin argues, rests on 'the descriptive fallacy', the supposition that words are used only to describe. To claim to know is not to describe my state but to take a plunge – to give others my word, my authority, for saying that S is P, just as to promise is to give others my word that I will do X.*

Yet when P. F. Strawson (criticizing Tarski), put forward a performatory analysis of 'true' – to assert that *p* is true, he suggested, is to confirm *p*, or to grant that *p*, as distinct from saying something about *p* – Austin protested. No doubt, he argued, '*p* is true' has a performatory aspect, but it does not follow that it is a performatory utterance.

To assert that *p* is true, according to Austin, is to maintain, in a sense which, he freely admitted, needs clarification, that '*p* corresponds to the facts'. This, he says, is 'a piece of standard English',

*Pritchard had already suggested that 'I promise . . .' is neither true nor false, but 'a sort of incantation, a linguistic device by which the speaker imposes an obligation on himself'.

and as such 'can hardly be wrong'. Austin tried to clarify the meaning of 'correspondence' in terms of *descriptive* conventions, which relate words to types of situations, and *demonstrative* conventions, which correlate sentences with the actual historical situations which are to be found in the world. To say of 'S is P' that it is true, he suggests, is to say that the situation to which it refers is of the sort that is conventionally described in the manner in which it is now being described. (To put the matter roughly: 'the cat is on the mat' is true if and only if that is a correct description of the sort of situation which we have before us.)[33]

In his William James Lectures on *How to do Things with Words* Austin re-examined the whole doctrine of performatives. These lectures are as near as Austin ever got to 'a science of language'. It is clear that he conceived this science in an odd way, reminiscent of Bacon's *New Atlantis*.[34] It was to involve neither experiment nor fieldwork, but, rather, the cooperative discussion of examples derived from a variety of literary sources and from personal experience. These were to be examined in a completely theory-free intellectual atmosphere, with no problem in mind except the problem of describing.*

Austin begins *How to do Things with Words* by restating his 'performative-constative' distinction in a neat and tidy form.[35] (He now prefers 'constative' to 'descriptive', since he thinks he has shown in 'How to talk' that 'descriptive' has only a very limited use.) Performative utterances, he suggests, are 'happy' or 'unhappy' but they cannot be true or false; constative utterances are true or false. Thus although 'I name this ship *Queen Elizabeth*' cannot be false it is 'unhappy' if I am not entitled to name ships, or if this is not the right time to do it or if I am using the wrong formula. 'He named that ship *Queen Elizabeth*' is, in contrast, true or false, not happy or unhappy.

*The contrast between Austin and Popper is instructive. For Popper, there is no such thing as theory-free description, and any worthwhile contribution to knowledge begins from a problem. Whereas Austin is suspicious of talk about 'importance' and suggests that the only thing about the 'importance' of which he is confident is 'truth', Popper argues that what we have always to seek are *interesting* truths, interesting in relation to important problems. The contrast between Austin and Wittgenstein is scarcely less obvious.

But now the doubts begin to creep in. First, on the side of performatives. When we come to look more closely at 'happiness', Austin points out, we see that it always involves something's being true, e.g. that the formula is in fact the correct one, that the person using it has in fact the right to use it, that the circumstances in which it is being employed are in fact the right circumstances. This difficulty might seem to be easily met by the reply that even although the happiness of the performative utterance presupposes the truth of certain statements, the performative utterance is in itself neither true nor false. But the same interplay of truth and happiness, Austin remarks, applies to statements – to the statement 'John's children are bald', for example, if it refers to John when John has no children. It is then not false, but 'unhappy', improperly uttered. And, on the other side, such a performative as 'I warn you that the bull is about to charge' is surely open to criticism on the ground that it is false that the bull is about to charge. So it is not as easy as it at first seemed to be to distinguish between statements and performatives by contrasting what is true or false with what is happy or unhappy.

Then can, perhaps, performatives be distinguished from constatives on some other grounds – grammatical grounds, for example? We might be led to hope so, since performatives are so often expressed in a special sort of first person indicative: 'I warn you', 'I name you'. But, Austin points out, they do not always have this grammatical shape: 'You are hereby warned' is as much a performative as 'I warn you'. Furthermore, 'I state that ...' also has the first person grammatical form, and that, surely, is a constative!

Austin looks, therefore, for a different mode of distinguishing utterances, in terms of the kind of act they perform. He distinguishes three sorts of sentence-using act; the 'locutionary' act of using a sentence to convey a meaning, as when somebody *tells us* that George is coming, the 'illocutionary' act of using an utterance with a certain 'force', as when somebody *warns* us that George is coming, and the 'perlocutionary' act of producing a certain effect by the use of a sentence, as when somebody, without actually telling us that George is coming, *succeeds in warning us* that he is on his way. Any single utterance combines, Austin came to think, locutionary and illocutionary functions.[36]

On the face of it, locutionary acts correspond to constatives and illocutionary acts to performatives. But Austin has rejected the view that a particular utterance can be classified as a pure performative or a pure constative. To state, as much as to warn, is, he says, to *do* something, and my action in stating is subject to various kinds of 'infelicity'; statements can not only be true or false, they can be fair, precise, roughly true, rightly or wrongly uttered and so on. On the other side, considerations of truth and falsity apply directly to such performative acts as a judge's *finding* a man guilty, or a watchless traveller *estimating* that it is half past two. So the distinction between performatives and constatives must be abandoned – except as a first approximation.

Have these distinctions – and the many other distinctions which in *How to do Things with Words* Austin makes, exemplifies, and names – any importance as a contribution to the solution of traditional philosophical problems, as distinct from problems in a science of language? Very much so, if Austin is right. Elucidation, he suggests, is always of the total speech act; so there is no question, as 'logical analysts' thought there was, of analysing the 'meaning' as something sharply distinguishable from the 'force' of a statement. Stating and describing are, simply, two kinds of illocutionary act, devoid of the special significance with which philosophy has commonly endowed them. Except by an artificial abstraction which may be desirable for certain special purposes 'truth' and 'falsity' are not, as philosophers have commonly supposed them to be, names for relations or qualities; they refer to a 'dimension of assessment' of the 'satisfactoriness' of the words used in the statement in relation to the facts to which they refer. ('True', as we might put it, means 'very well said'.) From this it follows that the standard philosophical distinction between 'factual' and 'normative' must go the way of many other philosophical dichotomies.[37]

Characteristically, however, these somewhat startling conclusions are only *asserted* to follow, not shown in detail to do so; Austin's detailed care is devoted to linguistic distinctions. Only by taking such care, Austin might have replied, is it possible to advance philosophical discussion. Philosophers have attacked the stronghold when they ought to have been reconnoitring the foothills. Only after they have classified and clarified all the possible

ways of *not exactly doing things,* for example, will it be time for them to ask themselves in what human action consists, and long after that how such actions are to be explained.[38] But it is hard to resist the conclusion that Austin thought he already knew that the stronghold was empty, but the foothills fertile.

Austin's line of reasoning is taken over, to cite one of many examples, by S. E. Toulmin – of Cambridge origins but subsequently an inhabitant of Oxford – in his 'Probability' (*PASS*, 1950). Philosophically-minded probability-theorists, he argues, fascinated by the intricacy of puzzles about infinite classes or by the elegance of the calculus of probability, begin their analyses at too elevated a point. They should start by considering how we ordinarily use such expressions as 'I shall probably come'.[39] Then it will be clear, he thinks, that to say '*S* is probably *P*' is to make a guarded and restricted statement: it is to commit ourselves to a certain degree – for 'we are prohibited from saying', for example, 'I'll probably come, but I shan't be able to' – but only with reservations, which we often make explicit. ('I'll probably come, but it depends on what time we get back from the Zoo'.) There is no particular 'thing', Toulmin concludes, that probability statements are about – neither 'frequency', nor 'an overlap between ranges'; a probability statement is not distinguished from other statements by having a special subject-matter, but by involving a special degree of commitment. Frequencies or overlaps might be appealed to, he admits, as a *backing* for a claim that this or that will probably happen – but they are not *what* we are claiming. Thus, Toulmin suggests, Reichenbach, Carnap and von Mises are contending in vain. Each of them has gone in search of what simply does not exist – an entity named by 'probability'. Unwilling to admit the fruitlessness of their quest, they bring us back not probability but something quite different, and then quarrel about which of these substitutes is *really* probability.

Probability is not the only area of dispute which 'ordinary language' philosophers have declared wasteland. Consider, for example, D. Pears' article on 'Universals' (*LL* II). Each of the traditional theories of universals, he argues, fails for precisely the same reason; it attempts a *general* answer to the question 'why do we name things as we do?' In so doing, it inevitably presumes

that the answer is already known; it is no accident that all the traditional 'theories of universals' turn out to be circular. For although we can explain why *particular* things are called by the same name, why, for example, Pomeranians and Alsatians are both called 'dogs', the more general question why we use names at all, Pears argues, could be answered only by overstepping – in language! – the bounds of language. Such a pursuit of the impossible, he admits, may have its value, for we may learn how language works by trying to defeat its workings, but it certainly cannot lead to definite answers to definite questions.

The justification of induction, too, has gone the way of 'probability-theory', most clearly perhaps in P. F. Strawson's chapter on 'Inductive Reasoning and Probability' in his *Introduction to Logical Theory* (1952).[40] It is absurd to suppose, he argues, that induction can be 'justified' by showing that it is *really* a variety of deductive reasoning – whether reasoning from an ultimate 'inductive premise' or from the axioms of the calculus of probability – and to attempt to justify it by 'its success' is to rest induction on induction, for any such attempt involves the presumption that what was successful in the past will be successful in the future.

Suppose, instead of seeking a justification, we ask, simply, whether it is 'reasonable' to rely on inductive arguments. Then, Strawson argues, the answer is bound to be 'Yes', because 'being reasonable' *means* 'having a degree of belief in a statement which is proportional to the strength of the evidence in its favour' – the reasonableness of induction is, then, analytic. So there can be no question of *showing* that induction is 'reasonable' or 'justifiable'. We can properly ask whether we are 'justified' in accepting *this or that belief:* but we can no more ask whether inductive reasoning *in general* is justified, Strawson argues, than we can ask whether the law of the land is legal.[41]

Philosophers, Strawson admits, tend to be dissatisfied with this line of reasoning; they complain that their qualms about induction have not been allayed. Somehow, they feel sure, they are being cheated. They are inclined to object: 'isn't it possible that a man might discover *another* method of finding things out, and mightn't it then be rational to prefer this method to induction? So, after all, isn't it necessary to show that induction is

the rational method to adopt?' This 'possibility', Strawson argues, is not a real one. For if asked to support the claim that he had discovered a new method better than induction, the inventor could do so only *by inductive reasoning*; he would have to defend such propositions as 'I always get the right answer be doing so-and-so' – propositions which could themselves be based only on induction. In fact, Strawson argues, the phrase 'successful method of finding things out which has no inductive support' is self-contradictory.

Strawson, it will be observed, makes very free use of the expressions 'analytic' and 'self-contradictory'; perhaps nobody since Leibniz has used them with such confidence. Not surprisingly, then, he has vigorously defended the distinction between analytic and synthetic against Quine's attacks on it.[42] Strawson and Quine, indeed, are the leading figures in the battle between 'informal' and 'formal' logic.

Ultimately, perhaps, the quarrel is between Strawson and Russell; always somewhat suspect at Oxford, Russell's philosophical ideas have recently been the main target of attack amongst Oxford logicians, who see in them the source of that Germanic-American formalization they so deeply mistrust. The *locus classicus* is Strawson's 'On Referring' (*Mind*, 1950) – an irreverent attack on that sacred doctrine of formalists, Russell's theory of descriptions.[43]

Russell, according to Strawson, made two connected mistakes; he overlooked the fact that a sentence can have a variety of uses, and he wrongly supposed that if a significant sentence is not being used to make a true statement it must be making a false statement. Russell's trichotomy – true, false or meaningless – collapses, Strawson thinks, once we realize that a sentence can be meaningless or significant but is never true or false, that a statement can be true or false but is never meaningless, and that on a great many of the occasions on which a sentence is being used the question of truth or falsity 'simply does not arise'. By a 'sentence' Strawson means a set of words or expressions. The same sentence, he argues, can be used to make quite different statements: 'the king of France is wise', for example, might be used to make a statement either about Louis XIV or about Louis XV; and it can also be used to crack a joke – as if I say, 'the king of France is the

only wise ruler in Europe' – or to tell a story. In these latter cases, anyone who replies 'but that's false' is quite misunderstanding, Strawson argues, the way I am using the sentence; he is assimilating all sentence-uses to statement-making.

Equally, Strawson thinks, to reply 'but there is no King of France' to someone who says, in a Republican age, that the king of France is wise is not, as Russell imagines, to *contradict* the speaker; if there is no king of France the question whether it is true or false that he is wise *simply does not arise*. Russell's theory of descriptions begins from the presumption that since 'the king of France is wise' is neither true nor meaningless it must be false; and again that since it obviously does not describe 'the king of France' – when there is no such person – it must *really* describe something else. After desperate philosophical struggles, Russell finally came to the conclusion that all propositions *really* ascribe predicates to 'logically proper' names, only to meet the complication that there are no such names. But if we recognize, Strawson argues, first, that the question whether 'the king of France is wise' has a meaning is quite independent of the question whether there is in fact such a king – it has a meaning if it *could* be used to talk about somebody – and secondly, that this sentence is not used to *assert*, although no doubt it ordinarily 'implies' or 'presupposes', that there is in fact a king of France, the ground is cut from under the theory of descriptions.

Formal logicians, Strawson complains, have concentrated all their attention on relatively context-free sentences – such sentences as 'all whales are mammals', which are not ordinarily used except to make the statement about whales that they are mammals; this explains why they have ignored the difference between sentences and statements. If they had looked rather at sentences containing such words as 'I' or such phrases as 'the round table' – sentences which can obviously be used on different occasions to make entirely different statements – the difference between sentences and statements would have been bound, he thinks, to strike them forcibly.

As Strawson explains in his *Logical Theory*, he has no objection to the construction of formal systems as such. Formal systems, he thinks, are useful in appraising 'context-free' discourse, as exemplified, say, in mathematics and physics. A formal logic,

however, needs to be supplemented by a logic of everyday discourse, for it is incapable, he tries to show, of coping with the complexities of ordinary speech. The 'if ..., then ...', the 'and' and the 'not' of the logician, he argues, are only a selection from 'the ordinary use' of these expressions; there are many kinds of entailment which the formal logician overlooks; the formal logician cannot deal effectively with arguments which depend on temporal relationships or are otherwise 'tied' to specific places and times. These defects, according to Strawson, can be overcome in an 'ordinary language' logic, which begins by asking such questions as 'what are the conditions under which we use such-and-such an expression or class of expressions?' Not so elegant or systematic as formal logic, such a logic can still, he thinks, 'provide a field of intellectual activity unsurpassed in richness, complexity and the power to absorb.'[44]

Of other philosophers teaching at Oxford in the post-war period, one of the best known is F. Waismann.[45] Waismann began as a logical positivist, but always stood particularly close to Wittgenstein. His *Erkenntnis* article on probability (1930), as has already been pointed out, was a development and clarification of Wittgenstein's ideas, and the same is true in some measure of his *Introduction to Mathematical Thinking* (1936).[46] Waismann entirely rejects the view that mathematics can be 'founded on logic'. Mathematics, he argues – even the arithmetic of natural numbers – 'rests on nothing'. It begins from conventions, not from necessary truths; its propositions are neither true nor false. We can say of them, only, that they are compatible or incompatible with certain initial conventions. If we were so to choose, there is nothing to prevent us from constructing a *different* arithmetic, with *different* conventions; we can easily imagine a world, Waismann thinks, in which such an arithmetic would be preferable to the one we now ordinarily use. A philosophy of mathematics, then, must be content to describe arithmetic, abandoning the attempt to provide a foundation for it. 'Only the convention,' Waismann writes, 'is ultimate.'

Numbers, he suggests in Wittgenstein's manner, form a 'family of concepts' – 'number' is not a single strictly definable concept. Exactly the same is true of 'arithmetic'. What we are prepared to call 'a number' or 'a kind of arithmetic' depends on

our traditions, not on formal definitions. Their 'openness' is a point in favour of these concepts, he suggests, because it leaves us free to incorporate new mathematical work within our already existing terminology – a possibility which fixed, pre-defined, concepts would rule out.

Waismann's conventionalism, together with his related emphasis on 'open texture', runs through his philosophical essays, achieving perhaps its best known expression in his contribution to a Symposium on 'Verifiability' (*PASS*, 1945, and *LL* I). He begins by criticizing, from a novel point of view, the earlier, phenomenalist, version of logical positivism: the fundamental objection to phenomenalism, he argues, is that the terms in a material-object sentence have an 'open texture'. If, then, we try to set out a collection of sense-datum statements which are sufficient and necessary to establish the truth of, say, the material-object statement 'that is a cat', we shall immediately be met with objections of the following sort: 'Suppose all these conditions were fulfilled, but the thing you have described as a cat were suddenly to develop into a creature of enormous size, what would you say then?' To these questions, Waismann thinks, there is no definite answer, just because 'cat' has an 'open texture'. We do not know what we should say; there is nothing to compel us to say that the suddenly-gigantic creature is or is not a cat. It is not just through somebody's oversight, Waismann argues, that the concept 'cat' lacks definite boundaries: the fact is that we can never know all about an empirical object, can never give a complete description of it. There is always the chance that it will turn out to have quite unexpected qualities.

An empirical statement, Waismann concludes, is never 'completely verifiable', since no battery of tests can establish its truth. This conclusion is not very startling; by the time Waismann wrote 'Verifiability' it was sufficiently agreed upon. But Waismann wants to go further: an empirical proposition, he argues, does not even *entail* specific observational propositions. If it did, it could be refuted by coming into conflict with observations; in fact, he considers, such a conflict is never sufficient to overthrow an empirical proposition. A discrepancy between our expectations and our observations can always be explained away by saying, for example, 'I can't have looked carefully enough'. All we are

entitled to say is that an experience 'speaks for' or 'speaks against', 'strengthens' or 'weakens' a proposition, never that it proves or disproves it.

More generally, he argues, such traditional logical relations as contradiction hold only between statements which belong to 'the same language-stratum' – between, say, two theorems in mechanics or two observations of the same pointer-movement.[47] Within a stratum propositions may conflict *simpliciter*, and, again, may be conclusively proved or disproved. The logical relations between two different strata, e.g. between laws and observations, are, he argues, quite different, and much looser – we ordinarily refer to them by such expressions as 'is evidence for', 'tells against', as distinct from 'contradicts' or 'proves'.

Waismann questions, too, the positivist doctrine that 'reality is made up of facts in the sense in which a plant is made up of cells, a house of bricks, a stone of molecules'. Language, no doubt, is made up of separate sentences, but such sentences, according to Waismann, make cuts through reality; they do not merely picture facts which are already there, waiting to be recognized. How we make our cuts will very largely depend, he argues, on the structure of the language we are using; merely because the Englishman says 'the sky is blue' rather than, as in some other European languages, 'the sky blues', he is bound to see the world differently. Facts do not 'speak for themselves', even although, equally, we do not *invent* them.

This general point of view is a little more fully worked out in a long series of articles on 'Analytic-Synthetic' (*Analysis*, 1949–52). Waismann never completed this series of articles and their outcome is not entirely clear. But it has been widely read as a plea for a loose and liberal attitude to language, as opposed to the tendency of 'ordinary language' philosophers to emphasize 'rules' and 'correctness'. ('I have always suspected,' writes Waismann, 'that correctness is the last refuge of those who have nothing to say.')

Like Quine, he questions the orthodox view that there is a precise distinction between 'analytic' and 'synthetic'. He tries to show, in the first place, that none of the distinguishing criteria ordinarily suggested is *itself* precise – that, for example, anyone who argues that analytic propositions are 'grounded on definitions' has failed to observe that 'definition' has itself an open texture – and in the second place, that there are very many propositions which, like 'I see with my eyes', we should hesitate to describe either as analytic or as synthetic, as necessary or as contingent. Once again, then, edges are blurred; an apparently sharp, formalizable, distinction leaves us uncertain what to say.

This uncertainty, Waismann will not admit to be a sign of imperfection; it is the great virtue of language, on his view, that it leaves room for us to say something unexpected, unconventional. The philosopher who plays the schoolmaster, castigating all departures from 'correctness', inevitably moves within the narrow set of categories implicit in the forms of his own language; thus he quite fails to perform the philosophic task: 'philosophy *begins* with distrusting language.' No doubt the philosopher should pay some attention to the 'stock use' of expressions; but if he has anything to say, Waismann thinks, he will very quickly be obliged to depart from that stock use.